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Kissinger's Excesses

Something of a fuss is being raised over the revelation of secret CIA efforts to overthrow the Allende government in Chile—raising a question in the minds of some whether any clandestine operations at all are “legitimate.”

My own instinct, like that of most Americans, is to be offended by our meddling in other countries' affairs. But I don't see a need to challenge CIA functions in Soviet-bloc countries, which are the counterpart of KGB operations in the West.

THE REASON, I think, is that the United States has a proclaimed policy of rivalry toward the Soviet bloc, and vice versa. Each country knows that the other is engaged in clandestine undertakings against it, and tacitly accepts them. Equally important, the American people know it, and over time have ratified it.

That, I think, is quite different from the CIA's work in Chile. The Allende government may have been displeasing to Washington, but it posed no threat. Allende himself, despite his Marxist ideology, offered us his friendship. We, in turn, were publicly aloof but promised solemnly that we would stay out of Chile's affairs.

The fact that we did not stay out, I believe, is deception of a high order of magnitude.

An administration, and even a bureaucrat, has the prerogative to make decisions on the execution of policy. In the CIA's world, I can understand if some of these decisions are secret. But an administration, much less a bureaucrat, does not have the prerogative of making policy in secret, unless we are to subvert the essential meaning of democracy.

WE HAVE ample evidence of the disastrous consequences of secret policy-making in foreign affairs. The very

expression “Bay of Pigs” sums it up. We had another example in Cambodia in 1970. Now it's apparent that Chile, too, was an enormous blunder—creating fascism for the Chileans and, without compensating benefit, tremendous ill will for us.

To blame the CIA for this is to turn away from where the real responsibility lies. We know this decision was made at the highest level, by a president who has since been discredited by other deceptions and driven from office.

The evidence, however, also implicates the man who was then Nixon's national security adviser, and has since been promoted to secretary of state. We Americans have tended to deify Henry Kissinger and to find all sorts of excuses to separate him from the excesses of the administration he served.

But how heavy a price must we pay for Kissinger's sweetly reasonable manner, and occasional diplomatic successes?

ONE OF THE grounds for the impeachment of Nixon was abuse of power. Kissinger has consistently abused power by secret policy-making—and no more flagrantly than in the Chilean affair. It's not a question of diplomatic morality; it's a question of democratic process.

Right now, the scapegoats for the secretary's excesses appear likely to become two middle-level State Department officials who lied to Congress to protect the cover of the Chilean operation. Whatever penalty they may face, they can scarcely be made to accept responsibility for the deception.

This is a matter of Watergate magnitude. It's time for us to acknowledge that Kissinger's rules of the game are not terribly different from Nixon's. Most Americans now agree that Nixon's rules were a threat to our democratic system. I think we should conclude from the Chilean episode that Kissinger's are, too.

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